



M-NCPPC



## *News Release*

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### **County Executive, Council and M-NCPPC Announce Initiatives, Commitment to Open Space 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Agricultural Reserve Celebrated**

In marking the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Montgomery County's award-winning agricultural preservation program, Montgomery County Executive Douglas M. Duncan, County Councilmember Michael J. Knapp and Derick P. Berlage, chairman of The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) today previewed new initiatives to further strengthen agriculture in order to preserve open space in the County. According to the Natural Resources Defense Council and the American Farmland Trust, Montgomery County has the most successful farmland and open space preservation program in the country.

"Montgomery County leads the nation in land conservation, but in order to continue our environmental success we must act now to save family farms," said Duncan. "We must ensure that the next generation will enjoy the same benefits from farmland and open space that we have today."

According to County farmers, the greatest challenge to their economic survival is crop damage from the overpopulation of deer. In the FY2006 budget Duncan will send to the County Council next week, he is proposing a nearly 20% increase in funding for agricultural support. This includes an additional \$112,000 for deer management initiatives, \$50,000 for a study of the future of farming, and \$10,000 to provide technical assistance to farmers.

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The M-NCPPC reaffirmed its commitment to the preservation of Montgomery County's agricultural heritage. "M-NCPPC will spearhead initiatives to commemorate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the visionary Master Plan for Preservation of Agriculture and Open Space by working to ensure that the County's Agricultural Preservation programs reflect 21 century land use issues and agricultural economics," said Berlage. "The best way to safeguard Montgomery County's agricultural reserve is to safeguard the profitability of farming."

Berlage announced that M-NCPPC will convene a land preservation summit for public and private groups to review a variety of issues important to the future of the agricultural reserve. In addition, M-NCPPC commits to expanding Montgomery County's Deer Management Program including: public education and awareness of deer/vehicle collisions; landscaping advice for homeowners; managed hunts by qualified hunters under strict regulations; donation of venison to homeless shelters and food kitchens; and working with Maryland Department of Natural Resources to expand its deer management program in State Parks within the County.

Knapp will lead the legislative efforts necessary to implement budget initiatives and deer management measures in the County Council. He is also proposing to increase the profile and public awareness of agriculture throughout the county.

"Twenty-five years ago, public officials recognized that the best way to preserve farmland and open space was to preserve the business of farming," said Knapp. "As the population in our region continues to grow, this principle will become even more important in the future, and I intend to do all that I can to ensure this tradition is not only sustained, but flourishes."

Knapp is calling for increased marketing and outreach efforts; increased education activities for children through the Montgomery County Public Schools and other venues; and programs linking local farmers with cutting-edge agricultural research initiatives.

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## **Ag Reserve**

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Ninety-three thousand acres in Montgomery County have been set aside for agriculture and open space. The County's diverse agricultural industry has 577 farms and 350 horticultural enterprises, which annually contribute \$250 million to the local economy. The Preservation of Agriculture and Rural Open Space Functional Master Plan outlines the County's goals on land preservation, and an important component is ensuring the continued viability of agriculture. Increasing public awareness and appreciation for the agricultural reserve is also critical to the success of these efforts.

Montgomery County and The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission encourage the participation of all individuals in their programs and facilities. For assistance with special needs, such as large print materials, sign language interpretation, listening devices, etc., contact Marion Joyce, 301-495-4600, TTY 301-495-1331 or the Maryland Relay Service.

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